

Subject: *Shepherding God's Flock*

Scripture: *1 Peter 5:1-4*

This message is directed to the pastor, so I am going to preach this message to myself, and I would ask that you listen and pray for me that I'll be able to do what it says and be the pastor I'm supposed to be. It is important to remember the context of this letter. First Peter was written when believers were going through intense suffering and persecution. In tough times pastors need to stay faithful and step up to the plate. This was no time to shirk their duty or shrink back from danger. In a time of persecution, pastors are more at risk. The enemy's plan is very simple: discourage the pastor, distract him, defeat him, and in doing so, you will divide and destroy the flock. In other words, when times are the worst, pastors need to be at their best.

1. The pastor's role

Peter wrote as a pastor to his fellow pastors. He did not call himself the first Pope. He was an elder just like the others. Peter had some life-changing experiences, and it was out of those experiences he was able to serve the Lord. He was also a witness of the sufferings of Christ. The Greek word for witness is *martus*, from which we get the word "martyr." The word has a double meaning of someone who experiences something and they testifies of that experience to others. A martyr is someone who is willing to stand for truth and speak the truth even if it costs his life. Peter was also "a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed." He understood that he would share in the glory of Christ at the end of his journey. The Bible refers to the role of the minister in three interchangeable words:

- a) Elder – his maturity – the pastor is not to be a new Christian, but a mature believer **1 Timothy 3:6** Not a novice (lit. "one newly planted"), lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil. The word "elder" is *presbuteros*, from which we get the word "Presbyterian." Most churches had multiple elders.
- b) Bishop (overseer) – his management – The word "bishop" is *episkopos*, from which we get the word "Episcopal."
- c) Pastor (shepherd) – his ministry – to lead, feed, and protect God's flock; the pastor is a shepherd and God's people are sheep (vs. 2, 3 – "flock").

In order to fully understand a pastor's role, we need to understand the nature of sheep:

- a) Sheep are weak and needy – Jesus saw the multitudes and said they were "as sheep not having a shepherd." Sheep are dependent creatures. They need guidance and protection.
- b) Sheep are prone to stray – **Isaiah 53:6** *All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.* The writer of the great hymn said, "Prone to wander, Lord I feel it, prone to leave the God I love..."
- c) Sheep are valuable – in Bible times sheep were useful for milk and wool and sacrifices; God's sheep are valuable because they belong to Him and they were bought at a great price. **Acts 20:28** *Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Spirit hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.*

The pastor's role is important because of God's calling and those he cares for.

2. The pastor's responsibility

Most of you who are working have a job description. As a pastor I also have a job description, and it's found in the Bible. We find three things a pastor is responsible for:

a) To feed God's sheep

Peter remembered what Jesus said (Jn. 21:15-17). God's sheep need spiritual food. Sheep need to graze in green pastures. They must drink from still waters. I would not be faithful to my calling if I gave you a spiritual diet of "junk food." There is always the temptation to give people what they want instead of what they need. Paul warned Timothy, **2**

***Timothy 4:2-4**² Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. ³ For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; ⁴ And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.*

***1 Peter 2:2** As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby.*

b) To oversee God's sheep

The pastor is to guide and to guard the flock. Ultimately the pastor needs to see the big picture and do what is best for the whole church. The number one priority is to do things God's way, nothing less and nothing else. ***Hebrews 13:17** Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.* The pastor is to oversee the flock, not because he is forced to, but because he wants to. The pastor is not to be motivated by money or greed, but by a willing heart ("a ready mind").

c) To be an example for God's sheep

"God's heritage" is from the word for lot, portion, or assignment (from which we get our word "clergy"). Every pastor has a flock assigned to his care. The pastor must lead the flock, not drive the flock. Leading and lording should not be confused. Lording means to rule forcefully. It implies harshness and the excessive use of authority. The pastor is to lead by example. That means the pastor must be visible and the flock must see him. They must see him and hear him not only in the pulpit, but out of the pulpit. It has been said that a preacher lives in a glass house because people are always watching him and his family. That's the way it is supposed to be. His life should be seen, not because it's perfect, but because it should be an example to follow. Paul said,

***1 Corinthians 11:1** Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.*

After the service a little old lady spoke an encouraging word to her pastor as she was leaving: "I just think you're a model preacher." He really liked that and he would remind his wife what she said. One day she was ready when he brought it up and she said, "By the way, the dictionary says a model is a small imitation of the real thing."

3. The pastor's reward

The pastor must know that he is accountable to the Chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ. The pastor is an under-shepherd. In John 10:14, Jesus is the Good Shepherd who laid down

His life for the sheep. The focus is on His death. In Hebrews 13:20, Jesus is the Great Shepherd who rose again from the dead. The focus is on His resurrection. In 1 Peter 5:4, Jesus is the Chief Shepherd who will reward the shepherd. The focus is on His return.

In New Testament times crowns were given instead of trophies. Crowns were given for reasons: 1) for athletes who were victorious in the games; 2) for citizens who distinguished themselves in public service. But our text is talking about a different kind of crown, a crown of glory that doesn't fade away. What is important is that the pastor is faithful to God's calling. He must be faithful to the Lord, faithful to His Word, and faithful to His flock. The key is being faithful. See *1 Corinthians 4:1-5*.

Being a pastor is very rewarding. There is a sense of satisfaction that comes in knowing that you are living your life for God's purpose and plan, you have a calling and each day you are fulfilling it. But the great reward will come at the end. If the pastor can just hear the Lord say, "Well done, good and faithful servant." That's all that matters.

There is a unique relationship between a pastor and God's flock, and it's not to be taken lightly. It is a relationship that involves a deep level of commitment and trust on the part of the pastor and on the part of the church. It is a relationship in which both the pastor and the people are committed to each other. The pastor is committed to serve, to lead, and to feed. The flock is committed to pray for the pastor, to follow him as He follows Christ, and to serve along with him.